

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# All the Year Round

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## A STERN CHASE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

THE FIRST PART.

CHAPTER IX. OPEN WAR.

"YOUR stitches are not so even as usual, and you have not taken the right shade for that vine-tendril. See, my child, this is a leaf, not a stem colour."

The speaker ; a tall, middle-aged lady, who wore the white and blue habit of the religious order of the Annunciation ; pointed to the stitches in question, as she stood by the side of an embroidery-frame at which Ines was seated. In meek silence Ines drew out the silken threads, and sought for the proper colour among the balls of silk suspended in a basket from the frame.

"It is a pity to have to undo any of your work, for time presses. The banner will barely be ready for the Fiesta. You were late this morning, my child."

Ines leaned low over her work as she replied that she had not been quite well, and then asked the nun whether the browny-green silk she had selected was the right colour.

"Yes, that will do nicely. It is the reaction after the fright, I suppose, that has not yet passed away ; you were over-excited yesterday ; and to-day you seem tired. Make the stitch a little longer there ; have you not remarked the stringy toughness of the vine stem ? Try to imitate it."

Ines worked in silence, and after watching her progress for a few minutes, the nun moved on to a second work-frame, at which a young girl, wearing the white veil of the novitiate, was seated. The web stretched upon this frame was of the

finest and softest white net, and the worker was embroidering upon it a beautiful group of flowers in gold and silver thread. The fineness and delicacy of the work were marvellous, and the young lady executed it with the ease and skill of a true artist.

"Mariquita gets on very fast," said the nun ; "the wheat-sheaf is nearly completed."

"She has so much time," said Ines ; "if I could come for a whole day my vine-stalk and grapes would soon be done. May I come, if Doña Mercedes will let me ?"

"Assuredly, my child. You know you are always welcome."

The scene of this brief dialogue was a spacious, bare, exquisitely clean room, whose lofty, unglazed windows opened into a wide corridor overhanging the square patio of the convent of Las Anonciades. The cool shade, the profound quiet, the picturesque dress of the nun, and the occupation of the two girls, formed a pretty and peaceful picture. Not a sound broke the stillness around the little group ; the members of the community were all about their respective business ; the workers and their work was that of Sister Santa Gertrudis.

The contrast between the two girls was a striking one. The young novice was, like Ines, of a good Creole family, but she had neither beauty nor distinction. Her face was merely happy and intelligent. When, presently, at the stroke of a bell, she rose, put away her work-frame, carefully covered it, made her reverence to Sister Santa Gertrudis, and left the room with quiet alacrity, Ines followed her with a thoughtful glance. Mariquita was to live and die in that convent, within those very same four walls, and yet she was perfectly happy.

Ines had known Mariquita all her life, and she knew there had never been a trouble in that life. No hateful choice had been forced on her; of her free will, and with the cheerful consent of all belonging to her, she was about to take the veil. A little while ago, when Ines had been trying hard to reconcile herself to the alternative that awaited her refusal to fulfil the promise claimed by her cousin, she had regarded Mariquita as the most enviable person in the world. But she could not do so now. In the trouble of her mind, in the tumult of her heart, in the hope, sometimes overcoming the fear which beset her, there was a strange joy which seemed to set all her past existence, all her former ideas, far away from her. She could hardly believe herself to be the same person that day after day had gone to fulfil her voluntary task of needlework with the object of bringing herself to endure the idea of the convent more easily always before her. She was "a world away" from that now; the meaning of the grave and affectionate warning of Sister Santa Gertrudis was coming to her fully. No other life would be tolerable to her than that of Hugh's wife. Could it ever be? All her lover had said appealed to her reason, but there was an irresistible argument against it in her instinct.

Ines had lived more in the last two days than in her whole previous existence. How thankful she was that Norberto was debarred from the possibility of watching her! Under the most ordinary circumstances she would have found it difficult to keep from him anything which he was curious to discover; under the existing ones she would have despaired of doing so.

It was on these and similar topics that her thoughts were running, while her hands were busy with the many-coloured silk and the elaborate design of the piece of work before her. This was a banner to be carried in a religious procession at a Fiesta, which was to take place a fortnight hence, and the embroidery and material were rich and beautiful. The latter was thick white silk, the former a kind to be seen in its perfection in the Spains only—raised flowers, foliage, and fruit in all the natural shades, intermixed with a kind of trellis-work in gold and silver thread and spangles. It was with embroidery of this kind that the silken coverlets used in Spanish palaces, and richly wrought with the olive, the pomegranate, the vine, the orange, the

cactus, and the sunflower, were adorned. We may see their fresh colours and their unworn materials to-day, though the hands that worked them have been dust for centuries. Has anybody ever studied a great piece of needlework which has taken a long time in the doing, without thinking of the life-story that moved on with the movement of the needle and the gleaming threads, ended, and was forgotten?

If she could but speak to her friend of her trouble and her joy, some quiet might come to her, Ines thought; but this she dared not do. If her lover's bold project should by any miracle be successfully carried out, how infinitely delightful it would be to tell Sister Santa Gertrudis that it was not only from the danger of the earthquake that she had been rescued by her countryman, but from the more fatal peril of which the nun had warned her—the awful presumption of making the convent a refuge only.

It was impossible that the preoccupation of Ines should escape the observation of Sister Santa Gertrudis; but it elicited no remark from her. She felt great anxiety about the girl, but she had no power of interference, and wisely abstained from remarks which might increase the perturbation of Ines's mind. They spoke only of the work in hand, and when Teresita came as usual, they parted with the understanding that Ines was to give the first whole day which she could secure from the capricious disposal of Doña Mercedes, to the completion of her task.

Rodney and Hugh were to dine at Don Saturnino's, so that Ines had not many hours to count before she should see her lover, and ascertain whether that ominous change in her stepmother's manner, which she had been as quick as her lover to remark, really boded them ill, or was only an effect of the temper that kept all the household on the alert, without being apparent to the outer world.

But a terrible disappointment awaited Ines. Doña Mercedes was indisposed. She had not attended Mass, nor had she been visible that morning. Ines was not privileged to go to her stepmother's room uninvited, and she had to wait until her father appeared at breakfast to learn how far this untoward indisposition would affect the day's proceedings. Don Saturnino, who was always profoundly impressed by the importance of any ailment of his wife's, came in with a grave face, and answered

the dutiful enquiry addressed to him by Ines with seriousness. Doña Mercedes had slept ill ; she had a bad headache ; she proposed to keep her room for the whole day ; it would be necessary to put off their guests. He had sent a line to Rodney, and he was expecting a visit from Don Francisco Arroyo.

Ines heard this with dismay.

One of the few precious days on which she had reckoned was gone ! She knew well that they could not be free for long from the observation of Norberto. He was getting on capitally, her father had just informed her, and made little or nothing of his broken arm ; he would be about as usual in a very short time. Unless her lover could speak to her father very soon, it would be useless. Her stepmother and Norberto would interpose, and all would be over.

Don Saturnino's sociable disposition made him talk to the persons who were with him, whether they had any particular topic in common or not, and he talked to Ines during the long breakfast in a very pleasant way, to which she was not accustomed. They were alone ; the little boy was with his mother. How often Ines wished that she might venture to speak to him of the trouble she was in ; that she dared to say to him : "Father, I cannot marry Norberto, and I should be wretched in the convent. Don't condemn me to either, but let me be happy in my own way ; don't make me miserable for the sake of my mother, who would have given her life, had it been spared, to make me happy." Her father seemed to be nearer to her ; she had rarely been alone with him, and although he was always pleasant and good-humoured, he was generally careless, he observed her but little. But on this morning he was attentive and kind to her, talked to her "as though she were someone else" — as poor Ines expressed it to herself — and almost gave her courage to say the words that would have let in the light between them. Only "almost", unhappily ; she did not screw her courage to the sticking place, and the opportunity was lost for ever.

Don Saturnino frequently mentioned Hugh Rosslyn in the course of his rambling remarks, and Ines hung on his words with breathless interest. All must depend on Hugh's having made a favourable impression on her father, and being able to turn it to advantage speedily. And yet, she smiled bitterly at her own folly in

thinking that anything could avail. So the poor child went through a series of tormenting emotions, to compensate her for which would have required a good deal of the happiness that was so very problematical. At length Don Saturnino, having arrived at the end of a copious breakfast, betook himself to his affairs, and Ines was left to get through the day as best she could, and to wish in vain that she had some means of communicating to Hugh that her cousin's convalescence was making vexatious progress. She knew what Hugh would do when the ill-news that the dinner was postponed reached him. He would go to the Retreta, and to the Alameda, and most probably he would discover that there was a grand "function" at the cathedral in the evening, and go there too in the hope of meeting her. But it would be all in vain.

She wandered into the inner corridor, and, idly leaning on the rail, watched the coming and going of the servants in the patio, the falling water of the fountain, and the solemn strut of the grulla. Her eyes followed the heavy flight of an aura, as it flapped over the open roof, with a vague envy of the freedom of the creature. There was deep repining at her lot in her heart. To say to herself a thousand times an hour, "He loves me," was her only resource against the misery that oppressed her. She took up a book, one of the few and fatuous productions that were allotted to her reading, but the pages withheld from her the little meaning they possessed. Not in them could she find an answer to the problem that was distracting her, how to communicate with Hugh.

The simple expedient of writing to him did not occur to her ; not even their stolen interview under the convent-wall was more subversive of all the disciplinary rules of her life than the notion of writing to her lover would have been. With the exception of some formal birthday epistles to relations, Ines de Rodas had never written a letter in her life, and she had not the means of writing. Pen, ink, and paper formed no part of the equipment of a Cuban young lady, even so late as twenty years ago.

The day wore on with its usual alleviations of bathing and sleep, and Doña Mercedes still remained in her room. Don Francisco had paid his visit, and found that nothing whatever ailed his patient, but was too polite and politic to say so.

Don Saturnino, disappointed of his dinner

party at home, dined out, and a lonely evening succeeded to Ines's long day, which had not been relieved by any of the ordinary incidents and interruptions. As the hours waned, Ines became more and more uneasy, from a growing conviction that the seclusion of Doña Mercedes was a menace to herself. Frigid and formal as their real relations were, her stepmother had not on any previous occasion allowed a whole day to pass without seeing Ines, and it was with mingled relief and dread that she at length received a summons.

The apartment of Doña Mercedes was spacious, and more luxuriously furnished than the other parts of the house ; yet her boudoir would by no means have come up to the European notions of a lady's private sitting-room. With the exception of a few articles of Indian carved wood, and some pictures of but moderate merit, the furniture was like that of the sala—of cane and bamboo. Adjoining the boudoir was the large sleeping-room and bath-room, communicating with the little boy's quarters, and the windows of the whole suite looked out upon the patio. The boudoir was lighted with wax candles ; their soft and subdued lustre was not strong enough to reveal to Ines, until she had advanced to the middle of the room, that it was not her stepmother who occupied the long cane couch at the farther end, but Norberto de Rodas.

With an irrepressible start and exclamation, Ines recognised and recoiled from him. His arm, encased in splints, and lying in a black leather sling suspended from his neck by straps, was resting upon the arm of the couch. He was about as pale as his dark complexion would admit of his being, and his face bore traces of pain and irritation. He made no attempt to rise, and he affected not to notice the surprise and embarrassment of Ines.

"You did not expect to see me, mi Inesita ?" he began deferentially, and with a mock gentleness which made Ines cringe with fear.

"I did not. Doña Mercedes sent for me to come to her."

"Not to me. I understand the difference ; but I cannot think you would have refused to come, had you known that your poor cousin and servant awaited you."

"I thought you were ill. I did not know a broken arm could get well so soon."

"It has not got well ; and I am breaking

the laws of Don Francisco, by which I ought not to have moved for a week hence, on pain of fever and other penalties ; but, you see, I am here by favour of my good and faithful friend, Doña Mercedes, and you know why."

Ines had stood still on the spot where she had first recognised him, and she remained there while he was speaking.

He laid a strong emphasis on his concluding words, and she perfectly understood the menace in them. The first thrill of fear over, her courage rose to the occasion. She took a seat, and, deliberately turning her head aside and so placing her fan that it entirely concealed her face from him, she answered slowly :

" You run a great risk, I imagine, in making such an exertion. If you mean by saying I know why you have done it, that it is on account of your wishing to see me, it is a foolish risk as well."

Norberto heard this cool answer, uttered with the aplomb of a woman of the world, with great surprise. Never in her life had Ines spoken in that way before. The very sound of her voice was altered ; its girlish clearness was changed for a hard, determined ring.

" Wise or foolish, my cousin, I have done it, and I at least may claim the grace of speech with you without being received as you seem disposed to receive me. I beg you to lay aside your fan, and let me see you."

" I hold my fan as it pleases me to hold it," said Ines, giving the tortoiseshell toy a contemptuous toss without altering its use as a screen, and thus preventing herself from catching the scowl of vindictive fury with which Norberto regarded her—an exact counterpart of the last look of his that she had seen. " You can say what you want to say."

" You are quite piquante and interesting, my fair cousin, in this new mood of yours. If I were not in love with you already beyond increase by any fresh development of your charms and graces, your pretty impertinence, which is as amusing as it is powerless, would make me your slave. I may say, then, that my anxiety to see you, to be assured by my own eyes that you have not suffered by the shock of the 'tremblor', has got the better of my pain and illness, and brought me here. You were alarmed, of course ; but, more fortunate than I, you were not hurt."

" I was not hurt ; I did not get out, as you did, and so I escaped the crowd outside, which proved to be the greater danger."

She spoke without the least intention ; she knew nothing about her father's suspicion of Norberto's cowardice. That he had not tried to help her was a matter of such entire indifference to her that it had no place in her memory. But he fully believed that her words were meant to convey a deliberate insult, and they swelled the account against her that he was keeping in his sullen breast.

"I heard some idle rumour of your being saved by an Englishman—a person whom the Señor Rodney, presuming upon his own introduction to my uncle, brought here." How he cursed that fan steadily held up between her face and his lowering, evil eyes ! "It is a lie, of course, for there was no question of saving anybody, and just such a lie as these braggart Englishmen like to tell of themselves and each other, but not a pleasant one for us, who know those gentry, to hear."

"It is a truth, and you know it is, for my father told you what happened. When he was separated from me by the rush of the crowd, the Señor Rosslyn came to my rescue."

"And instead of taking you out of the theatre, he kept you there, alone with him—a stranger—an Englishman, until your father went back and found you, long after all danger was over. You see, I know the truth."

"It was a lie just now ! Choose which you will have it. He saved my life; and my father and I, at least, are grateful to him."

"He did no such thing. There was no danger. He imposed upon your fears, and took advantage of your innocence to endanger your reputation, and get a footing for himself in my uncle's house. For the first I shall tender him the thanks that are due to him from your future husband ; the second I shall take care he does not do."

Ines rose and confronted him. She was nearly as pale as himself, and her dark eyes blazed with scorn and anger. For the moment she had ceased to fear him. She measured him from head to foot with her incensed glance, and she saw that he knew he had gone too far.

"Cousin Norberto," she said, closing her fan sharply, and striking it against the palm of her hand in a kind of emphasis to her words, "I think the truth is best between you and me. I enter into no question with you of the English señor who saved my life. No doubt he will very

well know how to answer any doubts you may affect to throw upon his conduct, like the gallant caballero that he is. But I tell you this : the last time you spoke to me you said there was a bargain between us, and that it had two sides—"

"It is well you remember what I said. May your good memory prove a good adviser !"

She brushed his remark away with a movement of her fan, and went on as if he had not spoken :

"There is no bargain any longer—I break it—I end it ! You may do your worst to me. You speak of yourself as my future husband—that you shall never be ! I hate you, Cousin Norberto, and I would die a hundred deaths rather than become your wife !"

Her voice had dropped with every sentence ; at the last it was very low, but perfectly clear and articulate. For one moment he gazed at her in silence ; the next he burst into a noisy, forced laugh.

"I love you, Cousin Ines, and I will marry you, by the will of your father and the command of your mother, before you are many months older."

"I will tell my father to-morrow what my determination is," said Ines, still as if he had not spoken, although his last words had turned her cold, "and also that I am ready to enter the convent at once, if he desires it. But of this you may rest assured : you have threatened and insulted me for the last time. From this hour I will never be alone with you—coward as you are—so help me God and the saints !"

Again he mistook the intention of her words ; again he believed her to be alluding to his desertion of her in the earthquake, and he was stung into fury. She had been right in thinking that he had previously perceived that he had gone too far, but now his rage blinded him, and as she turned her back on him, and walked to the door, he sprang up, strode after her, and stopped her with his uninjured arm. She shrank with horror from his grasp, and strove to fling it off, but in vain ; his hand held her shoulder like a vice, and his evil eyes darted all the malice of his heart at her in the few seconds during which he was fairly inarticulate with rage. When his words came they were these :

"Then, so help me God and the saints ! I will have my revenge ! You have chosen ; so be it. Now hear my resolve ; it will hold as good as yours, be sure of that.

I know what has done this! I saw you smiling in the Englishman's face, and I heard you talking to him in his accursed tongue, when you had nothing but black looks and silence for me! You were alone with him in the theatre. You would prefer him to the convent—shameless that you are! Do so, and you will send him to his death. So sure as you are alive and hear what I say, I will kill him!"

His grasp upon her shoulder relaxed; he fell exhausted into a chair. For a moment after she was free, Ines stood as if rooted to the spot; the next, she fled.

The door on the opposite side of the room opened, and Doña Mercedes appeared on the threshold.

"Madman!" she exclaimed. "What have you done?"

Ines locked herself into her own room, and falling on her knees before the little shrine, gave way to a paroxysm of fear and grief. But this did not last long. The terrible position in which she was placed; the complication that had now arisen; the overthrow to the little hope she had entertained; but, above all, the danger to her lover—all these crowded upon her and forced her to action. In the agony and tumult of her mind, she had a clear perception of two facts: that Doña Mercedes was to be reckoned henceforth as an open and active enemy; and that Norberto, coward as he was, and as she had called him—she could never cease to be glad she had done that—would fulfil his threat if she gave him the opportunity. This was the first time that Ines had beheld the awful spectacle of a man's evil passions unchained, and she had understood it aright. Norberto would not lack courage to murder her lover in order to gratify the passion of revenge, the strongest of all those that rioted in his evil nature.

She must find some means of communicating with Hugh at once. Not that she would tell him of Norberto's threat—she was warned by instinct that to do that would only make him seek a quarrel on the instant, and rush into a deadly danger—but that she might make him understand how hopeless his project was, and entreat him to leave the island at once, for the sake of her peace. He would go, he would be safe, and then she need not fear Norberto, but might break her heart and die.

She rose from her knees, bathed her eyes, and went in search of Teresita. In a

few words she told her old nurse that the two whom Teresita hated with all her capacious heart, were persecuting her; and that she must see the English señor on the next day if possible, for he would help her.

Teresita's voluble comments were as emphatic as her affectionate distress, and she got through a whole litany of curses while Ines was explaining that it was she who must do the errand to Hugh. The old woman undertook it cheerfully; she could slip out without being missed; neither master nor mistress was about to ask questions.

Then Ines threaded a needle with red sewing-silk, and rapidly traced the following words in English on a strip of cambric torn off a handkerchief:

"Convent wall, at seven."

She folded the missive, pinned it inside Teresita's bodice, and dismissed her. Then she re-locked her door and waited. She was undisturbed; no message from Doña Mercedes reached her. In a reasonable time, though it appeared very long to her, Teresita returned. Unlike Juliet's Nurse, to whom Hugh had likened her, she did not keep her young lady in suspense, but told her at once that she had succeeded in her errand, and handed to her Hugh's first letter.

#### THE OLD ORIGINAL.

In the month of May, 1835, Mr. Thomas Walker, M.A., of Trinity College, Cambridge, barrister-at-law, and one of the police-magistrates of the metropolis, took it into his head to give the public the benefit of the opinions which, like Mrs. Wititterly, he had formed on a great variety of subjects, and to that end started a threepenny weekly magazine. Pecuniary profit, he declared in his prospectus, he did not seek, intending to be no more influenced in his writings by a desire for profit than he was in his magisterial decisions by a desire for popularity. As is the case with most founders of new publications, if we may believe their own protestations, the good of society was his principal object; and he aspired "to set an example towards raising the national tone in whatever concerns us socially or individually", by developing the truth, and presenting it in a form as attractive and intelligible as possible. Whatever was "most interesting and important in

Religion and Politics, in Morals and Manners, and in our Habits and Customs" was to furnish matter for the "Original."

It must be confessed that Mr. Walker made but a feeble beginning. The "Principles of Government", even though considered in their different phases as Democratic, Ochlocratic, and Oligarchic, may be a subject thoroughly calculated to raise the national tone, but it may also be eminently fitted to exercise a directly opposite effect on the national spirits. "Remarks on the Life of Numa Pompilius" may point a moral, but cannot fairly be called particularly interesting; while laboured essays on "Parochial Government", "The Office of Coroner", and "The State of the Handloom Weavers", may perhaps develop the truth, although it would be easy to find more attractive ways for its presentation. In fact, the Original laboured for some time under the worst disadvantages which can afflict a magazine—it was dull. So dull that it is hard to understand how it survived its first weeks at all; so dull that its decease, after a brief career of some six months, is no matter of wonder; so dull that it is, at first sight, difficult to make out why even its memory should have survived that of so much of the periodical literature which has succeeded it.

But the Original had, after all, really something to say. There was at least one subject, a subject which always appeals to the human—heart, let us say—of which Mr. Walker was undoubtedly a master, and about which he began to chat in Number Thirteen of his magazine in so pleasant and agreeable a manner as to make one forget all his political economy, and all the queer padding with which the Original was eked out. The great subject of the Art of Dining—or Aristology, as Mr. Walker calls it—is the one on which the Original is most original, and on which it discourses with a cheery wisdom and shrewd sense, which are just as applicable to the matter to-day as they were in Mr. Walker's time. Indeed, it is curious to see how many of the conventional absurdities which it rebukes are still in vogue, and in how many respects the ways of dinner-givers, much as they have undoubtedly improved, are no better than they were fifty years ago.

It is odd to find the modern complaint of the cumbrous overgrowth of society, and of the consequently outrageous and unwieldy size of entertainments of all kinds,

and of dinners in particular, anticipated in the Aristology. Once upon a time, according to another paper in the Original, the ring in Hyde Park, "still traceable round a clump of trees near the foot-barracks," enclosed "an area of about ninety yards in diameter", and here "used to assemble all the fashion of the day, now diffused round the whole park, besides what is taken off by the Regent's Park". Let anybody compare a map of London of 1835 with the Post Office Directory map for this year, and consider how, if society found itself too large then, it manages to exist at all now. No wonder that Mr. Walker, with somewhat gloomy prescience, uneasily asked, "At the rate the country is advancing in wealth, what will be the comparison at the end of the next half century, and what will be the burden of the National Debt?", although it is probable that if he could once again revisit the glimpses of the dining-room lamps, even his foreseeing soul would be considerably astonished in both particulars.

Like all people who have given serious study to this question, the Original is strongly opposed to great parties. Eight is, in his opinion, the limit of a desirable party, and in this calculation he has the support of a distinguished modern Amphitryon, whose "octave" parties have achieved considerable celebrity. Indeed, six seems to the older authority even a more desirable number than eight, and, in conceding an increase to the larger number, he is convinced that beyond that limit there is always a division into parties, and a partial languor, or sort of paralysis, somewhere about the talk. "For complete enjoyment," he says, "a company ought to be One; sympathising and drawing together, listening and talking in due proportions—no monopolist nor any ciphers." Of course, this is not intended as an advocacy of solitary dining, which is, at best, a dreary and unsatisfactory business, but is meant to express the unanimity of the party—"a sort of general oneness", as Mr. Curdle remarked in describing the unities of the drama—while it should be the host's duty to give the tone and keep things going. This theory is excellent in itself, but experience seems to show that it is just a little difficult to reduce to practice. Quoting Paulus *Æmilius*, "the most successful General and the best entertainer of his time;" the Original says that it requires the same sort of spirit to manage a banquet as a battle; but, if this were to be taken as an infallible

rule, it would be found that very few people are competent to give dinner-parties at all, while it is certainly only in very exceptional circles that eight people can be often gathered together, who are competent to listen and talk in such due proportions as that each shall contribute his or her fair share to the brilliancy of the evening. In such cases, too, what would become of the professional diner-out, of the man who is invited because of his reputation as a dinner-table *racconteur*? His occupation would clearly be gone—but perhaps it is open to question whether this would be an unmixed disadvantage to anyone but himself, for, in nine cases out of ten, he is a bore: a monopolist of talk, besides being, like one or two of his kind who have recently departed this life, overbearing in his manners, and rude and insolent in his speech—a social nuisance, in fact, who might well find a place in Mr. Gilbert's list as one of those who “never would be missed”, if they were to be swept away altogether.

Intimately connected with the question of the number of guests permissible at table is that of service, on which, indeed, the comfort and happiness of the diners depends quite as much as on the good things which may be given to them to eat and drink, or the other kind of good things to which their neighbours, or they themselves, may give utterance. “A chief maxim of dining with comfort is, to have what you want, when you want it,” and this most desirable end is certainly almost unattainable at what is called a dinner-party, where the wise man is he who takes what he can get, understanding well that he is only going through one of the tedious conventional forms of society, and is not, in the proper sense of the word, dining at all. In a small party the guests can be properly waited upon without any very great difficulty. In a large one, unless the establishment is normally on a grand scale and the servants specially educated for the purpose, a scramble, full of disappointments, is all that can be expected.

In fact, it is a mistake to class the great set parties to which the conditions of most people's lives occasionally condemn them, with dinners, properly so called, at all. Such a function is a banquet, a ceremonial feast, if you will, but is no more capable of being made an enjoyable meal than is a ball-supper, or a wedding-breakfast. But, like other uncomfortable things, it promises to survive many generations of reformers and satirists, besides those who

have already assailed it, cheerily or angrily as their temperaments prompted them, but, in any case, to no purpose.

And even the state dinner, the real state dinner be it understood, is not so very bad after all. Where the position and habits of the host make such entertainments mere matters of course to him, and where the ordinary establishment is on a sufficiently large scale to admit of the preparations and service being carried out on a proper scale, with a proper discipline, and without taxing the resources of the servants or the peace of mind of the dinner-givers, the ceremony may be tedious but will not be altogether disagreeable. It is the sham which is so terrible. It is when people, whose household arrangements would be equal to the comfortable accommodation of eight or ten guests, vainly try to entertain twice or thrice the number, that dining out becomes a dreary sacrifice and dinner-giving an anxious penance. Westbourne Grove and Tottenham Court Road have improved many things. It is possible nowadays to have a dinner provided at reasonable expense, even in comparatively humble houses, which would have been impossible when the only choice lay between the ordinary middle-class cook and the local confectioner. The attendance in such cases may be as good as the dinner often is, and people no longer pretend, as seems once to have been universally the case—if we may believe the savage onslaughts on the pastrycook and the attendant greengrocer in which Thackeray so often indulged—that the conditions under which they live while they are giving set dinners are exactly the same as those which regulate their ordinary daily lives. There are not so many good cooks in the world that a dinner, even for eight persons, is not likely to be better if it is “sent in” by one of the firms which know all about providing for large and small parties alike, than if it has to be managed by the ordinary domestic cook in the middle of the inevitable worry and trouble which any entertainment must cost somebody. But it is when the set dinner is tried on too large a scale with the insufficient resources of an ordinary house, supplemented by casual and ill-disciplined assistance, that one can understand and appreciate the bitterness with which the subject of dinner-giving has been treated by so many writers.

“Ten,” says Thackeray, who had evidently studied his Original, “is the

utmost number that a man of moderate means should ever invite to his table; although in a great house, managed by a great establishment, the case may be different. A man and woman may look as if they were glad to see ten people; but in a great dinner they abdicate their position as host and hostess.... and are guests at their own table.... I have marked many a lady watching with timid glances the large, artificial major-domo, who officiates for that night only, and thought to myself, 'Ah, my dear madam, how much happier might we all be if there were but half the splendour, half the made dishes, and half the company assembled!' The description and the moral are true enough, and are none the worse for having been anticipated by Mr. Walker, who describes the host and hostess as presiding "as if they were the humblest of the guests", and as being "overwhelmed with anxiety respecting their cumbrous and pleasure-destroying arrangements". But something of pomposity and uncomfortable ceremony will always attend the set dinner-party, and the comfortable and cheery little entertainment will, in all probability, always be the exception.

The question of what you are to give your guests, is treated by the Original as one of the greatest importance, and no doubt it is, and his views are all in favour of a simplicity which can only be possible with a small party. But even here his enthusiasm, one may think, sometimes gets the better of his judgment. For small parties of intimate friends, some of the dinners which he describes would be excellent, and thoroughly appreciated; but, as he himself confesses, if the dinner is to be very plain a long and formal invitation should not be given. If people have three weeks' notice, and then find that they have been invited to a bit of fish and a cut off the joint, they will probably experience some disappointment, "partly because the mind would have been made up to something different, and partly on account of the more laboured preparations".

Most people will agree with Mr. Walker that "it is advisable to give some idea to the invited what it is they are to expect, if there is to be anything out of the common way, either as to company or repast; at any rate, it is expedient not to mislead, as some people are very much in the habit of doing, and then receiving their company with an apology, which throws a damp over the affair from the very outset"; but

the illustration which follows is of more doubtful application. The Original advises some such invitation as the following: "Can you dine with me to-morrow? I shall have herrings, hashed mutton, and cranberry tart. My fishmonger sends me word herrings are just in perfection, and I have some delicious mutton, in hashing which I shall direct my cook to exercise all her art. I intend the party not to exceed six, and observe, we shall sit down to table at half-past seven. I am asking as follows—" This, he declares, he would greatly prefer to a formal one in general terms, and perhaps, in principle, he is right. But it must be owned that this sort of invitation is not one which could be addressed, and the bill-of-fare hardly one which could be offered, to any but very intimate friends, while a little more variety in the repast would certainly be consistent with an even extreme simplicity.

Similarly Thackeray, in "*Mr. Brown's Letters to his Nephew*", lays down the law that "mutton is as good as venison—beefsteak, if you are hungry, as good as turtle—bottled ale, if you like it, to the full as good as champagne; there is no delicacy in the world which M. Francatelli or M. Soyer can produce, which I believe to be better than toasted-cheese. I have seen a dozen of epicures at a grand table forsake every French and Italian delicacy for boiled leg of pork and pease-pudding. You can but be hungry, and eat, and be happy." All of which is very well, but if you were to ask a dozen epicures to dinner, and give them nothing but leg of pork and pease-pudding; or if you were to set down a party of people to whom you wished to show some of the civilities which custom and society demand, and will demand to the end of time, to herrings and hashed mutton, it would, it may be permissible to think, not be unreasonable in your guests if they were not altogether satisfied with the entertainment provided for them. Both Thackeray and the earlier writer, in the passages just quoted, were obviously confusing two branches of their subject, and were not sufficiently mindful of the fact that "a little dinner" which they had in their minds, and a "dinner-party", against which they were inveighing, are two entirely separate and distinct institutions, which are subject to entirely opposite conditions, and between which there is no sort of analogy.

Mr. Walker's own ideas on the subject of dinners are illustrated by three, which

he specially describes, all of the simplest kind, but all going on the principles that whatever the host gives should be the best of its kind, and should be perfectly well cooked, and, of course, that the party should not exceed six or eight. One dinner, "an example of the plain, easy style of entertainment," was given to a party of six in some Temple chambers, and the description of it deserves quotation. There was, "first, spring soup from Birch's on Cornhill, which to those who never tasted it, I particularly recommend in the season, as being quite delicious!" Is spring soup still a speciality at Birch's, by-the-bye? "Then a moderate-sized turbot, bought in the City, beautifully boiled, with first-rate lobster-sauce, cucumber, and new potatoes; after that, ribs of beef from Leadenhall Market, roasted to a turn and smoking from the spit, with French beans and salad; then a very fine dressed crab; and, lastly, some jelly. The wines were champagne, port, and claret." No doubt this was a capital dinner for the half-dozen men who ate it, and in whom it produced "such a vividness of conviviality" as Mr. Walker had never seen equalled, but, after all, it would hardly have been suited to a set party, especially if ladies were included. Nor would the Blackwall dinner—there are no Blackwall dinners now!—at which eight gentlemen sat down to turtle, whitebait, grouse, apple-fritters, and jelly; punch, champagne, claret, and, in the case of one heretical guest, bottled porter; or the Christmas dinner for three of crimped cod, woodcocks, and plum-pudding, accompanied by champagne, and followed by mulled claret. But, on the whole, Mr. Walker hardly shares Thackeray's opinion that "a dinner of men is well now and again, but few well-regulated minds relish a dinner without women".

Some of the discomforts which attended diners fifty years ago, and about which the Original has a good deal to say, have vanished, or have been modified by the progress of civilisation. The decoration of dinner-tables is sometimes overdone, and the guests are still too often hidden from each other by huge centre-pieces of fruit and flowers, and massive branches still too often "assist in interrupting the communication." But the system of putting a number of dishes on the table simply for the purpose of taking them off again after they had had time to get cold, which obtained up to quite a recent period, has been happily abolished. Nothing, how-

ever, moved the Original to such righteous indignation as this. "The present system," he says bluntly, "I consider strongly tainted with barbarism and vulgarity. . . . As tables are now arranged, one is never at peace from an arm continually taking off, or setting on, a side dish, or reaching over to a wine-cooler in the centre. Then comes the more laborious changing of courses, with the leanings right and left, to admit a host of dishes, that are set only to be taken off again, after being declined in succession by each of the guests, to whom they are handed round. Yet this is fashion, and not to be departed from." The fashion lasted a long while, but it was to be departed from in time, nevertheless. Another queer fashion has also disappeared, which seriously exercised the Original's mind, and to which he thus refers: "There is one female failing in respect to dinners, which I cannot help here noticing, and that is a very inconvenient love of garnish, and flowers, either natural, or cut in turnips and carrots, and stuck on dishes, so as greatly to impede carving and helping." This custom led to Mr. Walker's finding his efforts to carve a tongue much impeded "by a couple of ranunculus stuck into it, sculptured, one in turnip and the other in carrot", and to his denouncing it as "the true barbarian principle of ornament, in no way distinguishable from 'the untutored Indian's' fondness for feathers and shells". These artificial ranunculus came down to quite recent times, as men of early middle age can testify. And the tongue incident reminds us, by the way, that the *à la Russe* fashion has saved many harmless diners from the great carving ordeal, which was so terrible an infliction to the nervous and the unskilful in former days.

"Taking wine" is another institution, which is frequently dwelt upon in the pages of the Original, and which survives nowadays only at Freemasons' banquets and old-fashioned gatherings of a like sort, but was a first-class nuisance in its time.

The custom was pleasant enough, and not without significance, when a couple of friends nodded cheerily to each other over a glass of wine, and wished each other good health; but when it became almost—and, in the case of the host, absolutely—necessary to "take wine", as a mere conventionality, all round a large table, it became a burden against which the soul of man at last revolted.

Besides being a fruitful cause of over-

drinking, this absurd habit of taking wine was eminently calculated to disturb the whole economy of the dinner-table. Nowadays the wine goes round at stated intervals—frequent or rare, as the generosity of the host decides—but, if Brown challenged Smith to take wine, and the decanters were not on the table, everything had to stand still until the absurd ceremony was gone through. “It is dreary,” the Original pathetically laments—“it is dreary to observe two guests, glass in hand, waiting the butler’s leisure to be able to take wine together, and then perchance being helped in despair to what they did not ask for; and it is still more dreary to be one of the two yourself.” On this subject Thackeray says: “I have known a man of a modest and reserved turn, when asked to drink by the host, suddenly lightened up, toss off his glass, get confidence, and begin to talk right and left. He wanted but the spur to set him going. It is supplied by the butler at the back of his chair”, and declares that, if the host is a person of defective conversational powers, the remarks which become necessary if he asks a guest to take wine with him afford him the opportunity of making at least four observations which, if not brilliant or witty, are yet manly, sensible, and agreeable. But the custom had really little or nothing to recommend it, and, becoming, in an age when form and ceremony began to be less and less observed, a bore, was in due course swept away.

It is odd in these days of general and copious champagne drinking to note the respect with which the sparkling vintage—which, by-the-bye, was not always sparkling, for both Walker and Thackeray frequently allude to still champagne—was treated by the diners, and especially by the dinner-givers of fifty years ago. Among the unpleasant incidents at a great dinner, which are described in the Original, one of the most distressing is said to be “to be asked to take champagne, and, after much delay, to see the butler extract the bottle from a cooler”—which was on the dinner-table we may remember—“and hold it nearly parallel to the horizon, in order to calculate how much he is to put in the first glass to leave any for the second.” Probably a modern butler who went through this performance, at all events before the public eye, would pass a bad quarter of an hour with his master next day, but fifty years ago it would not have excited any very particular remark.

Indeed, according to the Original, there was generally but a very limited supply of champagne allowed, and the guests were perverse in the habit of dodging and finessing to get a little more than their fair share. “What can exceed the awkwardness of two persons who are going to take wine together, beating about the bush to get each the other to propose champagne—a scene I have frequently witnessed between the best bred people?” Mr. Walker plaintively asks. To obviate these difficulties it is suggested that the host should always announce, “to save embarrassment,” how many times the champagne is to be handed round—once, twice, thrice, as the case might be. Probably embarrassment would be rather promoted than saved, if a modern host were not only to put his guests on a short allowance of wine, but to announce the fact in order to prevent mistakes.

Besides the great subject of dining Mr. Walker dealt exhaustively with its cognate topic, “The Art of Attaining High Health”; and, if he could have practised what he preached, would, no doubt, have been in the fortunate position of having a good dinner every day, and of being perfectly well and healthy all the time. But alas for the weakness of mankind! The concluding “Address to the Reader”, in Number Twenty-nine of the Original, contains this sad confession: “My writings have latterly drawn upon me more numerous and cordial invitations than usual, which is a gratifying sign of approbation, but of somewhat ruinous consequences. Conviviality, though without what is ordinarily called excess, during the greater part of the week, and hard fagging during the remainder, with a sacrifice of exercise and sleep, must tell.” On the whole, Mr. Walker had been devoting himself too much to his dinners and too little to his health, and had to pay the usual penalty. It is so much easier to be wise in theory than in practice, to be careful and temperate in the study than in the dining-room!

## A STORY OF 1870. A COMPLETE STORY.

### CHAPTER I.

IT was early in the autumn of 1870, when the siege of Sedan was yet a thing of the future, and the battle of Gravelotte had only just been fought. We were at a little town near Metz, just within the German frontier, and our ambulance was busy, for all day

long for three long days waggon-loads of wounded had been coming to us, and the workers were all too few for the work that was to be done.

I need not enter into explanations of why I was wearing the red-cross badge, and why I was working here. This story is not of myself. I have told enough about myself when I have said that I am English; that even fifteen years ago, in that year of the war, I was no longer a very young woman; and that my life has had sorrows in it which I best forget, when hands and brain are occupied in helping others. I had attached myself to a German ambulance, and we had taken possession of a château from which the owners had fled.

Most of our wounded were Germans. But a few French had been sent to us too ; and amongst these was a young officer, Gustave de Bochet, a bronzed, good-looking young fellow, who, a few months ago, could have been but a lad, and now had lines of sternness and firmness about his mouth which told their own tale. It was in the evening of the 18th of August, the third day of Gravelotte, that he was brought in. He was badly wounded in the shoulder, where a ball had struck him; and had fainted from the loss of blood, and the fatigue of the long, slow journey in the jolting waggon, in the dust, and dirt, and heat.

We had not beds for all our wounded. A heap of straw was often all that could be offered ; and a mattress laid upon the floor was a luxurious resting-place. This young soldier, though French and a prisoner, was wounded badly, and in such cases our ambulance strove to be impartial. We found a mattress for him, and by the time the surgeon came to re-dress his wound, he had recovered consciousness, and was looking about him at his new surroundings.

Our French patients did not, as a rule, show much interest in things around them. They were in the hated German land as prisoners, and not as victors. As that was so, what did all else matter ? But our new patient was evidently anxious and curious concerning his whereabouts. His observant glance travelled all round the room, rested a moment on me, then travelled round again. Finally it rested on the surgeon, Herr Hartmann, who knelt on the floor beside him, and was preparing to re-bandage the wound.

Herr Hartmann's was not an attractive face. It was fair and fat, with puffy

cheeks and colourless eyes, and closely-shaven lip and chin. He looked with no good-will on the patient he tended, and the patient returned the antagonistic glance with interest. Neither spoke ; the bandaging was soon done, and the surgeon departed.

I remained by the bed when he had gone, for I had some soup for my patient, and had been waiting. He thanked me courteously as he took it from me, and I suppose the word or two I spoke betrayed that I was not German.

"Madame is English, perhaps?" he said.  
"Yes ; I have come to help."

"You were right to come to Germany," he replied ; "Germany will need your help more than my country." For those were the early days when France was confident, and her young soldiers spoke proudly as though success for their arms was a foregone conclusion.

"You must take your soup," I said hastily ; for the ward was full of Germans, and such unseemly confidence was apt to offend. The dark, sunken eyes met mine and smiled.

"Madame is discreet," he said. But he drank his soup obediently, and made no more dangerous remarks.

He had given me back the cup, and had thanked me, and I was turning away, when he called me back.

"I am not sure where they have brought me," he said, with more eagerness than the occasion seemed to warrant. "Perhaps madame will be good enough to tell me."

I told him the name of the little town, and it seemed for some mysterious reason to satisfy him. His face brightened.

"You have friends here ?" I said, drawing a swift conclusion. But the question proved unfortunate. His eyes grew grave and his lips stern again, as he answered :

"We have no longer, madame, any friends in this country. The war has broken all friendships."

I could not stay to answer him ; someone was calling for me elsewhere, and I went hastily. I had charge of two rooms, and it was from the other room that the summons had come. Our surgeon was there, deep in conversation with an old German civilian, Herr Steinberg, who owned a pretty little château near our ambulance, and was good enough to take much interest in us, and to give us a good deal of his company and all his opinions concerning the Emperor and his army, and the valley of humiliation that certainly and

deservedly lay before them. He was a fine, upright old man, with iron-grey hair, and keen, grey eyes, and the nose, and mouth, and chin of a man with an obstinate will of his own. He liked to lay down the law dogmatically to us all, and to Herr Hartmann as well as to the rest. The surgeon loved his own opinion, too, and generally abode by it, but he yielded it to Herr Steinberg ; and that had often been a matter of wonder to me. It no longer perplexed me after the few words I now overheard.

" You will come in when all is done to-night ? " said Herr Steinberg.

" I will come—yes. But last night I came, and Fräulein Minna would have no word to say to me."

" And I, therefore, had some words to say to her," said the old man grimly. " She will know better in the future."

After that, many things were clear to me. I understood why Herr Hartmann smiled so serenely on his troublesome old visitor, and reserved his opinion when it was likely to clash with Herr Steinberg's.

I returned presently to the other room, and after a few minutes Herr Steinberg stalked in, to talk to the German soldiers and improve their minds. He had many acquaintances by this time in the wards, and the men were willing enough to be reproved and set right in argument, when there was a reasonable hope of cigars rewarding meekness. He stalked about between the beds and mattresses, until he came to the corner close by the window where the young French officer lay. There was still a little light in the evening sky, and what light there was fell on the upturned face, and the old man started back as though he had been shot.

" One part of your prediction is verified, Herr Steinberg," said the young officer dryly. " I am disabled, as you see."

" Is your hurt serious ? " said Herr Steinberg laconically ; but his eyes betrayed, I thought, more feeling than his tone.

The reply was a little defiant, and so was the glance that accompanied it.

" I hope not. I hope to do good service in battle for my country yet."

" It will needs be in another war than this, then. Before you are back in France again, France will have learnt to know her masters. Her pride will be humbled again for a little while ; she will be craving peace with us—peace at any cost—peace on our conditions. She will have learnt the great lesson of repentance and submission."

" Submission to Germany's will is what she will never learn," retorted the young man fiercely.

" Time will prove. Bazaine must retreat. What say you to that ? The first page of the lesson is learnt, my friend."

" I do not admit that any lesson has been learnt. We estimate your losses as greater than our own."

" You estimate ! But we do not trust your estimates."

" They are not founded on opinion, but on fact."

" We do not trust your facts, monsieur. Your French facts are well known. We call your facts lies ! Your country is a country of lies, a country of scoundrels, a country of—" And there the old man went off into vituperations and oaths, to which my politely-acquired German did not extend.

Again my duties carried me into the adjoining room, and it was not until long after Herr Steinberg had taken his departure that I returned. Candles had been lighted, and made patches of sickly light here and there in the gloom. Some of the men were smoking the cigars which had been given them ; now and then from other beds a low groan or moan would come ; and at the upper end of the room some fierce discussion was going on.

I went from bed to bed, fulfilling to the best of my power the different demands—modest demands enough, for our poor fellows were inured to hardship, and were almost pitifully patient ; and, last of all, I sought Herr Steinberg's young antagonist. The pain-lined face he turned to me was flushed, and his eyes bright with excitement.

I gave him some water which he asked for ; then I sat down for a minute by his mattress.

" Your shoulder is troubling you tonight, I fear ? " I said.

" Yes ; it gives me pain."

He remained silent and thoughtful for a moment ; then he looked at me and said, sorrowfully, but with bitterness :

" Madame understands now how the war has broken all friendships."

" Peace will mend them," I said, trying to speak soothingly.

" Peace will end the war," he said with an impatient sigh ; " it will not end the bitterness which the war has brought." And then, after at least a minute's silence, he added : " It is not possible that Herr Steinberg will ever again forgive me for being French. I have taken the part of

my country, and fought for her. Nothing can alter that."

Herr Steinberg's friendship seemed to be strangely valuable; it was odd that he should have the power of inspiring such deep affection. Whilst I pondered this, my patient asked a question. He was at pains to ask it very casually.

"Madame knows Herr Steinberg. Possibly she is acquainted with the good frau?"

But madame was not, and said so.

"And there is a daughter, too," continued the young man in the same studiously listless tone.

"Yes; Fräulein Minna."

The listlessness had disappeared in a moment.

"You know her?" he said eagerly; "you see her sometimes, madame? Shall you see her again? Do you see her alone? Will it be soon that you will see her?"

Poor lad! There was not much mystery about his secret.

"No, I do not know her," I said; "I have heard her name, no more."

And the look of disappointment that crept over his face was most pitiful to see.

Someone needed me next moment, and I was forced to leave him. I was busy for the next few hours. But the little romance I had partly heard, partly guessed at, was often in my thoughts. I was growing old, but my youth was not so far behind me that I had forgotten it. I could be sorry still for the sorrows of young men and maidens. My heart ached for the poor young fellow, for whom the war had "broken all friendships"—which meant one friendship. And perhaps, because I was a woman, I was more sorry still for the unknown Minna, who had had "no word to say" to Herr Hartmann, her father's guest.

#### CHAPTER II.

"MRS. GREY."

It was a timid voice which called me, and the voice came from the adjoining garden, which was Herr Steinberg's.

I had come out for a few minutes in the early morning to breathe a little air, whilst the air was cool, and the dew was still heavy on the grass and leaves. As I passed by the low hedge of bushes which divided our neighbour's orderly garden from our own wilderness of down-trodden greenery, a quick step followed me, and someone called me by name. As I turned, a pretty,

slim young girl, with neatly-braided golden hair, and grave, grey eyes, came towards me and held out to me, across the low barrier of bushes, a little bunch of fragrant roses with the dew-drops trembling and sparkling on them. She offered them very timidly, looking deprecatingly at me as though she half feared a repulse.

"Will you be kind enough to take them?" she said, speaking in English in a slow, precise, grave way.

"To whom must I be kind enough to take them?" I said, smiling.

The fair little face blushed rosy red.

"Will you not take them for yourself?" she replied gravely. "Perhaps you have not time to pluck flowers. I thought that the rooms where you and the poor sick men are might look brighter, perhaps, with a few little roses there."

There were tears in the poor child's eyes, though she spoke in so deliberate and matter-of-fact a tone. She looked away to hide them.

"They suffer very much, do they not?" she said with a heavy sigh, still looking down.

"Some do."

"Everyone ought to be very kind to them. Is Herr Hartmann kind?"

"Certainly he is."

"But suppose one wounded man was French? Would he then be kind? He hates the French, he speaks cruelly, he might be rough. There is one wounded French officer at your ambulance, I have been told. Is he very ill? Is Herr Hartmann gentle with him? Does he suffer much?"

I answered the questions one by one, and tried to answer them cheerfully.

"Thank you," said Fräulein Minna, looking up at me and trying to smile through her tears; "thank you. Perhaps—if you put those roses where he could see them, he might look at them now and then—it might pass the time—it might make the pain seem less. I am sorry for him," she added in an explanatory way. "I used to know him. His sisters were my friends, and they went to the English school with me; and I cannot help being sorry for him now—that is natural, is it not? Girls cannot be patriotic like men. I cannot hate Gustave!"

"Do not try, dear?"

"No; I will not try," she replied gravely. "Good-bye, now. My father is angry if I stay out long."

Minna went her way, and I went mine. The overcrowded wards seemed oppres-

sive after the cool morning air out of doors, and the men were complaining already of the heat. When I took Gustave his soup, I took the roses too, and placed them near his bed. But he did not heed them. His face seemed to have grown thinner and older since yesterday, his cheeks were sunken, his eyes bright with fever, and the hand that touched mine was burning.

"Madame," he said, looking steadfastly at me as he spoke, "will you tell me the truth? Is my wound dangerous?"

For one moment I hesitated. If I had told the strict truth, I must have said that the danger to be feared was that of fever. But to have suggested such a possibility would have made it a probability.

"I hope not," I said. "You have only to behave well, and be obedient, and keep quiet."

He smiled in a very grave fashion.

"I want to live—for my mother's sake," he said.

"And for your own sake too, I hope?"

"For my own sake I do not much care," he replied in that despondent melodramatic way of youth, when life has been disappointing. "But I should not like my mother to grieve. And I should like to give these Germans one good lesson—to see them fly once before us. I should like to live for that."

I looked around me to see the effect of this incautious speech; but the Babel of tongues near us was too great for our conversation to be overheard. Moreover, he spoke French, which the German soldiers imperfectly understood. The rash speech had passed unheeded.

At that moment the surgeon came into the room. His eye fell at once on the flowers, and he smiled placidly.

"Fräulein Minna's roses," he observed.

"Yes—her gift to me."

"Ah! Last night she gave me one rosebud. That is dead. I cherish it still, for the sake of the fair hands that gave it; but I cannot wear it. Now, if you will permit, I will take one of these."

I wondered if he knew that his words were torture to one who heard them. His serene, self-confident smile gave double significance to his words, and Gustave scowled fiercely at him, and vouchsafed brief answers to the professional questions he presently asked. No sooner had the surgeon left the room again than Gustave called me to him.

"Madame," he said with the intense

quietness of passion too great to be expressed, "will you do me a kindness? Keep that man away from me—do not let him come near me again. I have changed my mind about desire for life—I would rather die a thousand times than owe my life to him."

But before the next evening closed it seemed unlikely that he would owe his life to anyone. Fever set in, as I had feared. We lost more poor fellows through fever than through their actual injuries; and my experience told me that hope for his recovery was very small. I heard our surgeon explaining how small; and I watched Herr Steinberg whilst he listened to the verdict. It struck me that the old man, though he made no sign of regret, asked more questions than were quite consistent with the indifference of his glance and tone, and that the surgeon's conclusive, business-like manner of speaking was for some reason displeasing.

Late that evening, as I glanced from a window, I caught sight of Minna standing in her garden with her face upturned to the window whence I looked. I had a little time just then, and went out to her. There was no good news to take, but anything, I fancied, would be better than such suspense as she was suffering. A little wicket led from one garden to the other, and she opened this and came to meet me.

The pretty little attempts at dignity and reserve were all gone now. When I put my arm around her and kissed her, she leant her head on my shoulder and sobbed like a child.

"My father has told me," she said. "He is very, very ill; he is suffering, and I can do nothing. Oh, I cannot bear for him to have to suffer and to die!"

I tried to soothe her, but the comfort at my command was not such as could help her much.

"If I had been a man and not a girl I might have been of some use. I might have been a surgeon and have had skill. I might have saved him!"

This heaping of hypothesis on hypothesis would have amused me at another time. It drew no smile from me now.

"I have done what I can," said the girl. "It is so little, but yet it is so hard to do."

"What have you done, dear?" I said wonderingly.

The girl was trembling from head to foot, and spoke with an accent of despair.

"I will marry him."

"Whom?"

"Herr Hartmann. I have promised."

"My dear child," I said rather sharply, "how can that possibly help Gustave?"

"Yes, yes—it may. Herr Hartmann has skill. He may save him now. But I feared that he was jealous of Gustave; he knew that we were about to be betrothed before the war, and he may have thought that I was cold to him because I still loved Gustave. I could not bear to think that perhaps he would not be as good to him as he might be. He is cruel—I know that he is cruel—I am sure of it when I see his eyes and he smiles. He might not have saved Gustave; but he cannot hate him any longer now. I have told my father. Father has wanted it for a long while, and I have not consented, and often he has been angry, but I have not minded. But now I have promised."

"Promised Herr Hartmann?" I said.

"No; I have promised my father. He will tell him when next he sees him."

I do not know what led me to act as I did then. It was inspiration. When I had bidden the girl "farewell", and she had returned to the house, I, too, found my way through the garden to the house-door. I meant to knock and enquire for Herr Steinberg, but at that moment the old man appeared, his hat on his head, a fat cigar between his lips.

"Herr Steinberg, can I speak to you?" I said. "Here, in the garden, if you please."

He bowed with stately courtesy, and followed me. Then I explained to him, as eloquently as my small vocabulary and imperfect grammar would allow, the greatness of the sacrifice that he was about to allow his daughter to make. I hope that I touched the old man's heart, which, after all, was less stony, perhaps, than he liked it to appear.

"Minna has one fault," he observed irritably when I had done. "She is obstinate. Herr Hartmann is a worthy man; but Minna decided some months ago that she would see no good in him, and she abides by that decision."

"You yourself are sometimes obstinate, sir, where your convictions are concerned."

"There is the firmness of consistency, madame, and the firmness of folly."

"She is firm to an old attachment, which, I believe, you yourself once sanc-

tioned. If you did so, yours was the error in the first place. You will pardon me, I hope, for saying that you should now suffer for your own folly, rather than ask your daughter to suffer for it."

Herr Steinberg had been meek tonight; but that was even more than meekness could endure.

"Madame," he said wrathfully, "you labour under a great mistake. I have been guilty of no folly. I sanctioned the intimacy between the lad Gustave and my girl—that is true. I would have sanctioned the betrothal also; but I was guilty of no folly in that. The lad was a good lad; he was unfortunately of French birth and parentage, but his mind was German. There was no folly about the matter, madame. I am not accustomed to act with folly and inconsistency. The lad is fighting in a bad cause, and dying for it; but the cause does not make the man. The lad was a good lad, upright, true-spoken, brave. As for Herr Hartmann—who stated that I should allow my girl to ally herself to a man for whom she entertained no respect? who said I should allow her to be guilty of such idiotic self-sacrifice as you say she contemplates? I bid you good-night, madame. I regret that you have fallen into such strange mistakes."

With that the old man bowed and left me. He left me reflecting, not on my own mistakes, but on his admissions. In his desire to prove himself right in all things he had become Gustave's ardent supporter again. And he had taught me, if I had needed to learn the lesson, that an obstinate man, like lower animals of the hog kind, will prove his own determination of character, and your futility, by negativing your presumptuous assumptions as to the road he will choose to pursue. Well, I was content.

Some days later, I sat on a low seat by Gustave's mattress, and watched him sleeping, and waited for him to awake. The fever had passed, and I knew that he would recover. When I had waited long, he stirred, and opened his eyes, and fixed them on me.

"I have had a dream," he said, with a far-away look still in his eyes. "In my dream the war was over. Friendship had proved stronger than bitterness, madame. It is not a dream that is likely to come true."

But the dream came true after all.

## ON CLEVER WOMEN—THEIR POSITION AND THEIR PROSPECTS.

IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

IN my former paper I spoke of some of the advantages which cleverness brings to a woman, and then of the disadvantages which generally seem to follow in its train.

The question that has now to be asked is this, is this widespread feeling that women are better without cleverness mere prejudice, or is there any ground for it?

Well, I am not prepared to say that it is altogether unreasonable, however much I may pity the somewhat hard lot of many clever women. I do think that some clever women, especially young clever women, are apt to think too much of cleverness, and even to foster and nourish their intellects at the expense of their hearts. Perhaps it is no more than natural that they should. Their cleverness brings them many pleasures; it is a gift which, among women, is something out of the common, and they are likely enough to be somewhat proud of it—to think that it constitutes their special glory, and that they had better make the most of it. This, therefore, they proceed to do; and when they emerge from their studies, the consciousness that they are something rather remarkable, and that curious eyes are fixed upon them, makes them lose their heads a little. For my own part, I fully believe that the deplorable, as well as ludicrous, errors of taste and feeling into which some of our clever women occasionally fall, are simply due to the comparative isolation of their position, and to the excessive self-complacency or pugnacity into which—according to their various natures—they are forced, by the attitude which is taken by others with regard to them. However, I am not now concerned with excuses for their failings, but with the admission that failings they have.

Then it seems to me—that I cannot speak at all positively as to this—that a woman who is endowed with wealth of brain develops in intellect faster than she does in heart. It is evident enough that there are in the lives of all of us certain periods when one side of our nature develops rapidly while another remains dormant, and this not entirely, at any rate not obviously, by force of circumstances; and if I am right in thinking that in women development of brain for a while retards development of heart, we must expect to find a clever girl somewhat incom-

plete—somewhat, in fact, unwomanly. This may also suggest a reason for the fact—for I think it is a fact—that clever women do not very often marry young, that they only become wives and mothers when the first blush of their womanhood has passed. Then, and only then, perhaps, does the woman's heart within them assert itself in all its power and fulness, and take that first place which every true woman feels it has by right.

This does not indeed answer the question which has sometimes set me thinking, why do clever women often marry men much younger than themselves? I can contribute nothing towards the solution of this mystery, beyond the reflection that, if my theory be a correct one, the awakening of the tender passion might come with the sweet shock of surprise to the clever woman of thirty as to the man of twenty, and stir their hearts with responsive emotion; and the tentative remark that the sight of

A perfect woman, nobly planned  
To warn, to comfort, and command,

—for such I must hold one rich in brain and heart to be—may appeal directly to the enthusiasm of fresh-hearted youths, whose ideals are high, and as yet untainted with the world's notions of what "ought to be."

But while admitting that the prevalent feeling against clever women is not altogether without foundation, I do think that we might reconsider our position with regard to them. It is surely going much too far when we shrink from a clever woman just because she is a clever woman. As a rule, I have found clever women far less ready than other women to pass harsh judgments on their fellows; far more apt to understand the kind feeling which prompted an awkward speech or a clumsy action; far more able to take a large, generous view of people and circumstances, and to recognise the claims of others as well as of themselves. They have not time for the petty jealousies, the small curiosities, the absorption in trivialities, which are apt to overcome their fellows. There may be a vein of satire running through their talk, but it is only a "gentle satire, heir to charity, that harms not." "There may be gall in the thought while there is honey in the feeling," as George Eliot well puts it; and who, I may ask in passing, of all those that have read her life, or even her works, need have been afraid to meet and talk with her—unless, indeed, they were conscious

that they were unworthy of her sympathy, and feared lest her keen eye might discover in them thoughts and desires which they would fain conceal? Does it not seem, indeed, as though the true cause of such a shrinking from the gaze of a woman or a man of penetrating intellect, must lie in ourselves rather than in the person from whom we shrink?

"But," it may be objected, "you are speaking as though all clever women were sweet and good. Whereas some of them are simply odious." Quite true, that latter remark. But, I may ask, are they the only women who deserve such an epithet? They are odious—to use a woman's reason—just because they are odious, not because they are clever. They might be as brainless as sheep, and yet, for all that, they would be odious still. Surely everyone must know that cleverness is by no means an ingredient essential to the compounding of a disagreeable woman—that whatever failings and follies a good-hearted and clever woman may possess, they are as nothing compared with the peevishness, the utter unreasonableness of a bad-hearted and brainless one! And if we come to talk, as we agreed was often done, of people being clever at such and such things, surely it would be far better to have one's wife or daughter clever at her books than clever at getting her own way, whatever it may cost. Depend upon it, the woman most to be shunned is the woman who, under an outward garb of innocence and simplicity, is really reading you through and through like a book, who knows how to get at your every little weakness, who works on quietly and stealthily until she has you securely in her net—even though she may be as innocent of Latin and algebra as a babe unborn, and may join with you, as heartily as you please, in your sneers at blue-stockings and women who ape men.

So much, then, for the change of attitude towards clever women which I think we ought to make. And if we are willing to adopt it, it will, I think, materially help to avert one of the dangers which now beset clever women—the danger, namely, that they will be driven into the endeavour to repress one part of their nature, and to force themselves into the mould of ordinary womanhood. This danger I believe to be a real one. A woman of warm heart and deep feelings cannot bear to feel that she is misunderstood—that she is given credit for a hardness and an independence

which are utterly foreign to her nature. The woman's heart within her grows stronger and deeper year by year; it clamours for recognition, for objects whereon it may lavish the treasures of its love and devotion, and yet find itself tenfold enriched in so doing; and should anything stand in the way of this—should she find that her studies, her meditations, her earnestly-laid plans hinder the attainment of a woman's greatest bliss, she will be likely enough to cast them all aside, even though it be to her as the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye. "Better go blind or maimed all my days," she may say, "than run any risk of the heart within me withering away for lack of recognition and use."

Not that I think her justified in so doing, or that she has any more right than the rest of us to throw away the talents entrusted to her. A nature which is only developed on one side must always have a stunted, maimed, imperfect growth. We cannot take the strength which was intended for one kind of work, and apply it to another totally different kind; we cannot even pretend that that strength is not. It is useless—more than that, it is harmful—to suppose that we can make of ourselves what we please. Each of us was formed upon a special plan; and, if we will not recognise this, so much the worse for us, and for the work which we were intended to do.

Granted that a clever woman's ideal woman may not be clever at all—that the type of womanhood which seems to her most charming is the sweet-faced, true-hearted wife, who does not attempt to share her husband's thoughts, of whom Tennyson says :

Her faith is fixt and cannot move,  
She darkly feels him great and wise;  
She dwells on him with faithful eyes,  
"I cannot understand : I love!"

Even then, whatever type of womanhood—or manhood—may be the most admirable to us, it is of no use for us to strive after it unless we have the materials for such a type within ourselves. A woman may admire the qualities and the powers of a man, and think him far above her own sex; but she will do herself nothing but harm by trying to copy him.

Again, beauty is a gift which every woman naturally longs to possess, and which raises her, at least in the estimation of men, to a higher level at once. But for those who have not been favoured with

this gift, what is the use of thinking about it, of grieving over it, of trying by every means in their power to remedy the sad deficiency? What is more pitiable than to see a hopelessly plain woman spending infinite pains and trouble upon trying to "make herself look nice"; to watch her vain endeavours after an end which she can never attain; to mark how the many things which she can do are left untouched, all because of her eagerness to do what, in the very nature of things, never can be done? Surely it is the true, the only wisdom for her to say: "Yes, the ideal woman must have beauty, doubtless. I have none, therefore I can never be the ideal woman; but I can be what I was meant to be—I may become the very best of my kind—I can strive after an ideal, although the very highest ideal must ever be beyond my reach."

And to my mind, the clever woman, even though she may not specially admire the kind of gifts which she possesses, should say the same. She may sometimes feel as if the misapprehension, the disapproval, the cold, unsympathetic glances which she has to bear, are too heavy a price to pay for the powers which she can bring into play—the pleasures which are as a sealed book to most of her companions; but she should bravely make up her mind that those powers were given to her to use, not to cast aside, and that the pain which comes to her through the using of them is a pain which she must be willing to bear. If it is to be escaped, it must be escaped fairly—by that quiet yet resolute exercise of all her faculties which must in time, I think, win over the distrustful—not by the shirking of part of her duty.

Perhaps some people may think it a mistake to urge upon anyone the abandonment of the highest ideal—the following out of his own particular bent, instead of the pursuit of ideal excellence. Certainly the doctrine may do harm, if pushed to an extreme; but what doctrine is there of which the same may not be said? Surely there is a middle course between foolish disregard of the opinions and tastes of others, and that nervous shrinking from anything which may call forth comment and ridicule, which tends to make this civilised life of ours so commonplace and monotonous. Surely a protest against the latter is to the full as necessary for the ordinary run of people as is a protest against the other.

For the sake of argument, I have been

speaking as though intellectual gifts were by no means necessary to the ideal woman—as if, indeed, they were a hindrance rather than a help to those who would strive after the highest excellence. But though some women may think, or rather feel, this to be the case, I must altogether differ from them. I cannot doubt that a woman who combines high intellectual gifts with purity of soul and strong capacity for affection, is the highest ideal of womanhood; that she, and she alone, can know the best, the highest kind of happiness, and give it to those she loves. Some such women may never find full scope for the powers within them—may "waste their sweetness on the desert air", as far as the nearest and the dearest ties are concerned; but the man who happens upon such a wife, the children who have the rare fortune to be brought up by such a mother, will acknowledge that "her price is above rubies".

To a true woman, the thought that she may prove a blessing to others is far sweeter than any consideration of personal welfare. But the latter is not altogether to be despised, if it were only that we may be of quite as much service to others by being as by doing; and I suppose that no one who has known the delights of study, of independent thought, of earnest endeavour to unravel some of the many mysteries which lie around us, can deny that they are a wonderful comfort and support to the mind, and that life would be far harder than it is, were they to be snatched away.

"We women," says George Eliot, "are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are, perhaps, the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life—some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed—because all their teaching has been that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience which they could confess without being laughed at. Yet surely women need this sort of defence against passionate affliction even more than men."

Such a defence our clever women have. Should they throw it aside—refuse to shelter behind it—sacrifice it to the prejudice which would make it out a weapon

instead of a shield? Should they not rather look upon their intellectual powers as a defence and safeguard to themselves—an aid to those they love—a gift for which, if it is never abused, never slighted, the world, their loved ones, and themselves, will be the happier and the better?

### COUNT PAOLO'S RING. A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

#### CHAPTER X.

"NANCIE, sympathise with me; I am so awfully disappointed."

There was real disappointment in Angela's voice, and Nancie, looking up from her work, saw tears standing in her eyes. She brushed them hastily away, and looked very much ashamed of herself; but others took their place, and refused to be concealed.

"Why, what is the matter? What dreadful thing has happened, my child?" Nancie asked.

"I have just had a letter from Noel; he will not be able to come next week."

"Not to the ball? Oh, what a nuisance! I am sorry. Why can't he come?"

"Oh, business, of course; it is always business," Angela said impatiently. "I don't feel as if I cared a button about the ball now, and I have been looking forward to it, and to his coming, so long. Is it not annoying?"

"Awfully; but never mind, my child, you'll enjoy yourself much better if he is not there," Nancie said philosophically. "Lovers—engaged lovers, I mean—are out of place in a ballroom. Sir Noel would be sure to give himself airs of proprietorship, and restrict your dances, and object to your partners, and scowl if you give any of the round dances to any man but himself, and generally make himself unpleasant. I am sure that, on the whole, you will enjoy yourself much better without him."

Angela flushed indignantly.

"I am sure I shall not. Then why did you persuade Mr. Lansdell to go?"

"Mr. Lansdell? Oh, he is different. In the first place, though he does not dance, he is too unselfish to wish to prevent me from enjoying myself. And as to being jealous—that," and Nancie laughed, "would be too absurd. I have promised to sit out three dances, and to go down to supper with him, and if he is not content with that he ought to be. I suppose this," and Nancie sighed comically, "will be my final

adieu to the pomps and vanities of the world in regard to public balls, and I mean to have a good time and enjoy myself thoroughly."

The ball of which Nancie spoke, and which both the girls were eagerly anticipating, was to be held immediately after Easter, in the town-hall. A Royal Duke and Duchess had consented to be present, and all the élite of the neighbourhood, including the county people, who for once had condescended to mix with the townspeople, had taken tickets, Sir Noel, who had spent Christmas at the Abbey, had promised Angela that, if possible, he would come down to assist at the important event; she had been eagerly looking forward to his visit, and her disappointment was very great when a letter arrived, a few days before the ball, saying that important business would detain him in town for some time. It was indeed very doubtful whether he could get away before July.

Now early in July both the weddings were to take place. December of the preceding year had been the month originally fixed, but in November a cousin of Mr. Monteith's died suddenly, and, as Sir Noel was unable to leave London for any length of time during the earlier part of the year, the weddings had been postponed until July. It had been a very happy winter to both the girls—happiest, perhaps, to Nancie, as, day by day, she watched her lover regaining health and strength, and taking up again with a thankful heart the burden of life's duties and responsibilities, which had so nearly slipped from his shoulders for ever. As soon as he was able to be moved he went to the Abbey for a few weeks, and afterwards, accompanied by Nancie, to Faneton Hall, the residence of his sister, Lady Alice Fane. Nancie returned delighted with her visit, with her future sister-in-law, and with the kind welcome which she had received from all Lansdell's friends.

And Angela also had been very happy. The doubts and fears which in the earlier part of her engagement had somewhat disturbed her peace, had quite disappeared now. She was quite satisfied now that she loved Sir Noel with all her heart—that she could wish for no happier fate than to be his wife. She had seen much of him during the past six months. He had spent Christmas and the New Year at the Abbey House, and he often, when unable to spare time for a long visit, came down on a Saturday, and remained until Monday

or Tuesday, and each time he discovered some new grace and charm in Angela, which sent him away more in love than ever with his beautiful sweetheart, and more convinced than ever of the wisdom of his choice. He looked forward with ardent delight to the month now rapidly approaching, which was to make his happiness perfect; and Angela, too, thought of it with a perfect content and pleasure. Her love, if not so ardent as Sir Noel's, was quite as deep and earnest; but, great as it was, it was not powerful and absorbing enough to banish the memory of the past from her heart. Her vow of gratitude, and her promise to Paolo, were as vivid to her now as on that day, nearly three years ago, when he had placed the ring on her finger; it was too strong for time to decay, for any other love, however strong, to blot out!

She used to look sometimes at the two rings on her finger, both pledges of a vow, of a promise given and received. One spoke to her eloquently, if silently, of older, sadder days, of Count Paolo's loyal friendship which had called forth her ardent gratitude; the other as eloquently of the love which had singled her out from all the world of womanhood, and made her life perfect. Which was the stronger vow? she wondered. Would the time ever come, when, as Paolo had told her, the wife's love would protest against the maiden's promise—when she would repent her vow, and long to recall it, and to send back its pledge? She asked herself the question, but, even as she asked it, her cheeks flushed hotly, and every pulse of her heart beat with a passionate denial. "Oh, never—never!" she used to say to herself, not even if its fulfilment caused the renunciation of all her happiness—of her life's best hopes. She would be faithful to that early promise, whatever came.

The news that Sir Noel would be unable to come to the ball was a great disappointment to her. It was her first public ball, and she had looked forward to it with all the pleasurable anticipation with which every young girl—especially when that girl is as beautiful as Angela—regards that important event, and all Nancie's well-meant, if somewhat cynical, consolations failed to convince her that Sir Noel's absence would increase rather than diminish her enjoyment.

"I am sure I shall not enjoy it one half so much. Why, one dance with Noel

would be worth half-a-dozen with any other man," she said indignantly.

"Really?" Nancie elevated her eyebrows. "Well, that to me would depend altogether on the way the beloved object danced, and whether his step went well with mine or not," she said coolly. "Sentiment, my love, is all very well in its way, but it is out of place in a ballroom. A lover—unless, indeed, he dances well—is on the whole rather a nuisance, and I don't fancy Sir Noel does shine in that respect; he seems to me too stiff in the joints, and—" Nancie looked mischievously at Angela and laughed. "Believe me, my dear child, you will enjoy yourself ever so much better without him."

"I wish he were coming, all the same," Angela said with a disappointed sigh.

She wished it still more when, on the evening before the ball, her dress—a charming combination of white silk and tulle and lilies-of-the-valley—came home from the dressmaker's, and she tried it on, and stood before the glass, and smiled with innocent delight and vanity at her fair reflection.

Nancie, who had chosen the dress, and had taken considerably more interest in Angela's toilette than in her own, was disposed to echo the wish.

"It is a pity Sir Noel cannot see you. I never saw anyone look half so lovely!" she said in a tone of enthusiastic admiration which brought the blushes into Angela's cheeks. "Ah, there is little doubt who the belle of the ball will be! We may all hide our diminished heads and sigh in vain for partners."

"Nonsense, Nancie!"

Angela was as little vain as any girl could be, but she was conscious of looking unusually well in her dainty dress, and it did seem, as Nancie said, a pity that Sir Noel could not see her.

"You always get plenty of partners, whoever else does not! Have you tried on your dress yet?"

"Not yet; oh, it is sure to be all right," Nancie answered carelessly; "there is no need to try it on."

"Yet you insisted that I should do so."

"You are different, my child. It is absolutely necessary that, on your first appearance in public, your dress should be perfect," Nancie answered solemnly. "I am an older stager; no one will take much notice of me, but you will be the—what's that long word?—the cynosure of all eyes. The girls will look you over, and pick you

to pieces, and find out all manner of defects in your complexion, and hair, and eyes. Now, I am not responsible," Nancie went on grandly, "for the defects of nature, but I am responsible for your dress, and that I am determined shall be perfect—as it is."

Angela smiled and blushed. It was very pleasant to listen to Nancie's sweet, flattering tongue; to know that she was so beautiful, and, in spite of the grief occasioned by Sir Noel's absence, her colour rose, and she looked forward with eager pleasure to the next evening, when she should make her first appearance, and win her first laurels in the social arena. She slept late next morning, and Nancie had finished breakfast and was standing by the window talking to the parrot, when she entered the breakfast-room.

Mr. Monteith had gone to business, and Mrs. Monteith rarely left her room before eleven; but breakfast was in that house, as it ought—according to the present writer's opinion—to be in every Christian household, a moveable feast, and was always on the table from half-past eight to ten, so Angela did not consider it necessary to apologise for her late appearance, but said good-morning, and rang the bell for some hot coffee.

Nancie looked round, and nodded a good-morning as she entered.

"Lazy wretch! Aren't you ashamed of yourself," she said gaily, "lying in bed on such a lovely morning? Why, I have been up for nearly an hour, and actually walked with father to the gate before breakfast, and the air was so deliciously pure and invigorating, that I instantly formed a resolution to take a walk before breakfast every day."

"And may I enquire how long that sage resolution will last?"

Angela came to the window, and looked outside into the pretty garden. The winter had been unusually mild, and although it was now only the beginning of April, many of the trees were in full leaf, and the garden was gay with daffodils, and hyacinths, and gaudy tulips. Nancie had a cluster of daffodils fastened in her dark-blue dress. She looked fresh, and bright, and wholesome, as the spring morning. She laughed at Angela's question, and her white teeth gleamed between her parted lips, and her whole face lighted up, so that it was a pleasant thing to see her laugh. Evidently Angela thought so, for her eyes lingered with a loving admiration on the sweet, merry face.

"How long? Don't ask disagreeable questions, Angela. Just exactly as long as my good resolutions do usually last—during the time that is employed in making them," she said gaily. "But why do you linger here, child? The breakfast waits, and about half-a-dozen letters require your immediate attention. I will leave you to digest them, and go and feed my chickens."

Nancie pushed the piece of sugar, with which she had been tantalising the parrot, between the bars of the cage, and opening the window, jumped outside, and disappeared round the corner of the house. Angela turned with a little curiosity to the table. The half-dozen letters of which Nancie had spoken consisted of two, and one of these Angela saw was in Sir Noel's writing. She took it up, and read it, before glancing at the other, and her eyes brightened, and her dimples peeped out, and her face flushed into such exquisite beauty, that it was really a pity that there was no one but the parrot and the little terrier to see her.

It was a very tender, loving letter—Nancie, who had once or twice been allowed as a special favour to read Sir Noel's effusions, declared that they were perfect specimens of their class, and Nancie had had plenty of experience, and was quite capable of giving an opinion—and it told Angela how sorry the writer was not to be present at the ball, but exhorted her to enjoy herself, not to dance too much with any one man—Angela thought of Nancie's remark, and laughed as she read the sentence—and to be sure and send him (the writer) a full and particular account of the evening. Angela blushed divinely over this interesting epistle, and especially over its concluding words. She put it on the table with a sigh of happiness. Oh, what a happy girl she was to have won such a perfect love, she thought—to have such a gallant gentleman for her lover!

The other letter still lay unread on the table, but a few minutes passed before Angela glanced at it. She got very few letters except from Sir Noel, and the writing on the envelope was unfamiliar to her. It was probably a circular, she thought, and she poured out some coffee, and helped herself to some cold pie before she took it up.

Then—was the writing so unfamiliar after all? Did it not remind her vaguely of two or three letters treasured carefully in her desk upstairs—those few letters which, during her first year in England, had come

to her from Count Paolo. The more she looked the stronger grew the resemblance, and her colour paled, and her heart beat fast, and she felt as if she dared not open the envelope.

Why should he write to her now after so long—after more than two years, unless indeed—! Had the summons come at last—the summons which she had looked for so long and vainly, and almost ceased to expect? The colour flushed again into her face; every pulse in her heart thrilled with wild enthusiasm as she looked at the letter. The ball, her coming marriage, even Sir Noel was forgotten as she tore it open with eager, trembling hands.

"MADEMOISELLE"—so the letter ran,— "If the promise you made three years ago is still remembered, still unrepented, I ask you to wear your ring at the ball to-night. The time has arrived when you will be asked to fulfil your vow. But if"—and the words were underlined—"other duties have arisen which render its fulfilment difficult or unadvisable—if you repent the promise which a too ardent gratitude called forth, rest assured that I shall not blame you if you draw back. Only, if your heart is still with us—if it is still strong to suffer and endure—wear your ring to-night."

That was all. There was no signature, no date; but it was quite sufficient for Angela. It told her all she needed to know—that at last the time had come when it was in her power to prove whether her earnest vow to Paolo had been but empty words or the solemn purpose of her heart.

For a long time—she did not know how long—she sat with the letter in her hands, gazing straight in front of her with dreamy eyes.

Nancie went past the window; bells rang; servants crossed and re-crossed the hall; the gardener came with the lawnmower, and whistled a gay air just outside the window as he sharpened his knives; the parrot swore in a bland undertone at the terrier, who retorted with a smothered growl; but Angela was deaf and blind to everything. Her thoughts had gone back to those old sad days in Nice, to the loyal friend whose kindness and pity had won her heart's best gratitude. She recalled their first meeting on that sultry summer's day, when, wearied and faint, she had stood from morn till eve under the old stone gateway, with her basket of flowers by her side. She recalled the insult she

had received, the sinking terror of the moment when help seemed so far away, and she, powerless to defend herself, shrank back in frantic fear, and felt the hot breath of the insulter sweep across her face.

And then there rose before her eyes the vision of Paolo's face, beautiful and terrible as that of an avenging angel, as he hurled her enemy aside, and shielded her. Could she ever forget that scene, or the weeks that followed, or that evening in Dr. Antonelli's garden, when all the love and gratitude of her heart poured out like an irresistible torrent, and she had prayed—Heaven knew how passionately, how ardently!—that the opportunity to prove it might be given to her! Vividly she could fancy the scene—the sunset sky; the neglected garden; Paolo's grave, beautiful face as he placed the ring on her finger. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes glowed at the thought.

"Repent—draw back! Oh, never!" she said half aloud, and she raised the ring to her lips and kissed it.

Nancie, who happened to be passing the window at that moment, saw the impulsive action and smiled. It was really quite refreshing in this matter-of-fact age to see anyone so much in love, she thought. Angela started, as if suddenly awakened out of a dream, when Nancie entered the room with a basket of flowers in her hand.

"Are they not lovely, Angel? I think that yellow narcissus is simply perfect, both in form and colour," Nancie, who was an enthusiast respecting flowers, said as she took down a dark red jar and placed in it a few of the stately flowers and their spear-shaped leaves. "I like the spring-flowers better on the whole than the summer ones, I think, don't you?"

"I? Oh yes, I think so."

But Angela spoke dreamily, and the odd look in her eyes deepened.

Nancie laughed.

"And how is the adorable, all-absorbing Noel?" she said lightly. "I see your thoughts are too full of his perfections to descend to any less sublunary matters. Oh, how nice it must be to be so frantically in love!"

"Noel? Oh, he is quite well; he is very sorry he is not able to be with us to-night," Angela said absently.

All day she went about the house with that odd, absent look in her eyes, that air of repressed excitement in her manner that puzzled Nancie. A certain amount of excitement was allowable, and indeed to

be expected on such an occasion as this, but Angela looked more than excited. There was an air almost of exaltation—of fervent enthusiasm in her manner.

"She looks more like a Jael or a Charlotte Corday, or one of those uncomfortable heroic people in history, than a girl going to her first ball," Nancie thought.

There were visitors in the afternoon; some merry girls who came for afternoon tea, and to exchange confidences respecting their toilettes, and two or three young men anxious to secure a dance from Nancie and Angela. Lansdell was there, and with him came a couple of young officers from Leeds, who both, immediately and with one accord, fell in love with Angela. She was very silent, but she looked more beautiful than ever, with that strange fire in her eyes, that look of rapt devotion in her face, as she leant back in her chair, with her yellow head resting against the purple velvet cushion, and listened with a dreamy smile to the merry, chattering tongues.

"What is the matter with Angela? She looks half dazed. Is it the prospect of the ball? Ah, it must be quite too delightful to feel so excited!" said one of the girls, a pretty little damsel of one-and-twenty, who was already used-up about balls and every other form of dissipation. "I remember how I looked forward to my first ball. I quite expected to meet my fate—my affinity—my whatever you like to call it there. But Angela—happy girl!—has met her fate already. What are you going to wear tonight, Nancie? Anything very startling?"

"I? Oh dear no: pale green and white. It is tempting fate, I know;" and Nancie laughed and glanced up at Lansdell, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with his cup in his hand, listening with a smile on his grave face to the sweet voice he loved so well.

"Tempting fate! Why so, Nancie?" he said.

"Don't you know the proverb, 'Green and white, forsaken quite'?"

Nancie laughed again, but her colour

rose, and her eyes drooped, beneath the look in Lansdell's dark eyes. Ah yes, she was quite secure; nothing could disturb his love. She might wear what colours she pleased—tempt fate as much as she liked—Nancie thought gladly.

Angela was glad when the visitors went, and she was free to sit and think of what the evening would bring to her. Lansdell, who had lingered after the other visitors, and was standing by the fireplace talking in a low tone to Nancie, glanced curiously at the quiet figure by the window, with her bent head and that strange, absorbed look in her eyes.

"Look at Angela! What is she thinking about, I wonder?" he said to Nancie, who glanced also and laughed.

"Of the ball, of course; or perhaps of Noel. I know she is very much disappointed that he is not coming," she said carelessly.

But Angela's thoughts had very little to do with Noel. They were full of Paolo's message. Who would she meet at the ball? she wondered. Would it be Paolo's messenger—or perhaps Paolo himself? And at the thought her eyes flashed, and her heart beat high with delighted anticipation.

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